

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT	
Project Name: Installation of an underground fiber optic cable.	Proposed Implementation Date: Summer 2019
Proponent: Nemont Telephone Cooperative, Inc. PO Box 600, Scobey, MT 59263	
Type and Purpose of Action: The proponent proposes to install an underground fiber optic line within a right-of-way 20' wide (10' on either side of a centerline) across School Trust lands in both Valley and McCone County. This line will be "knifed in" (entrenched using machinery that requires very little digging, usually a line about 12" wide at most). The crossing of the Missouri River on this tract will be an aerial crossing. The line will allow for improved telecommunication capabilities in this rural area and surrounding communities.	
Location: SW4NW4, W2SW4, SE4SW4, LOTS 7 & 5 of Sec. 36, Twp. 27N, Rge. 41E	County: Valley & McCone

I. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT	
1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED: Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.	Jodi Benson, Right-of-Way Agent for Nemont, informed staff at the Glasgow Unit Office(GUO) and Eastern Land Office(ELO) of plans for this project, and shortly thereafter submitted the Right-of-Way application. GUO staff reviewed and processed the application.
2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:	No other governmental agencies have jurisdiction over this project as it pertains to School Trust lands. Montana DNRC, Real Estate Management Bureau has jurisdiction over the project. Any other governmental permits relating to the crossing of the Missouri River are the responsibility of the proponent.
3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:	<p>Action Alternative: Grant permission to Nemont Telephone Cooperative, Inc. to install the fiber optic line on School Trust lands.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Deny permission to Nemont Telephone Cooperative, Inc. to install the fiber optic line on School Trust lands.</p>

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II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
RESOURCE	POTENTIAL IMPACTS
<p>4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE: Are fragile, compatible or unstable soils present? Are there unusual geologic features? Are there special reclamation considerations?</p>	<p>The area of impact consists of a variety of soil types that are common in the general area, none of which are fragile or unstable, and no unusual geologic features are present.</p> <p>Action Alternative: There will be temporary soil disturbance due to the digging (knifing) required to install the line underground. This disturbance is relatively shallow and does not remove/displace any soil. Slight soil compaction would occur due to temporarily increased vehicle use.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no changes to soils on the School Trust land.</p>
<p>5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION: Are important surface or groundwater resources present? Is there potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality?</p>	<p>This project is planned to cross over the Missouri River, which is an extremely important water resource.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The proposed line would be suspended over the Missouri River where it crosses. Unless a catastrophic accident were to occur, the line would not negatively impact the quality, quantity and distribution of water. In the event that an accident were to occur, damage to the riverbed and aquatic life would be very minimal due to the small cable size.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative, there will be no impacts to water quality, quantity and distribution.</p>
<p>6. AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality</p>	<p>This project is not influenced by any air quality regulations or zones. A short-term increase in vehicle traffic</p>

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

regulations or zones (Class I airshed)?

will result in a slight increase in dust. No pollutants will be produced.

Action Alternative: This type of project on the School Trust land will have minimal impact to the air quality. Some dust may occur due to vehicle use.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to air quality.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present?

The acreage within the area of impact consists of native river bottom rangeland, introduced tree and shrub species and tame grasses, managed for typical agricultural activities such as livestock grazing. No rare plants or cover types are present.

Action Alternative: The fiber optic line would have no impact on the vegetative community due to the knifing process used to install the line and the aerial crossing of the river.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to the plant communities on the School Trust land.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS: Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish?

The School Trust land provides habitat for upland birds, waterfowl, multiple fish species and deer. There is good potential for recreation on these tracts, due to ease of access from adjacent county roads and the fishing access site on the Valley County side of the river, located on this tract.

Action Alternative: Any impacts due to installation of the line will be small and will be mitigated quickly with the return to normal grazing/management practices.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

	to the possible use of the School Trust land as wildlife habitat.
9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES: Are any federally listed threatened or endangered species or identified habitat present? Any wetlands? Sensitive Species or Species of special concern?	<p>The area of impact is within the Missouri River bottom and provides critical habitat to multiple fish and game species. However, this habitat has not been specifically identified as being sensitive. The following species of concern are listed as being at least seasonally present within the area of impact: Hoary Bat, Little Brown Myotis, Great Blue Heron, Loggerhead Shrike, Burrowing Owl, Bobolink, Caspian Tern, Red-headed Woodpecker, Common Tern, Plains Hog-nosed Snake, Great Plains Toad, Northern Redbelly Dace, Blue Sucker, Iowa Darter, Shortnose Gar, Sturgeon Chub, Northern Pearl Dace, Paddlefish, Sauger, Pallid Sturgeon, Bald Eagle.</p> <p>Action Alternative: Installation activities may temporarily disrupt use of the area as habitat by the above species. Any impacts due to installation of the line will be small and will be mitigated quickly with the return to normal agricultural management practices.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to the environmental resources.</p>
10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES: Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?	<p>Class III cultural and paleontological resource inventories have been conducted of the area of potential effect (APE). Three cultural resources were identified. Site 24MC630 is a minimal historic trash dump, site 24MC629 is a small collection of chipped stone tools, site 24VL1686 is the remnants of a barge used in the construction of Fort Peck Reservoir. All of these resources will be avoided with ground disturbances associated with installation of the proposed telecommunications cables. As such, proposed developments will have No</p>

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Effect to Antiquities as defined under the Montana State Antiquities Act. Formal reports of findings have been prepared and are on file with the DNRC and the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer.

Action Alternative: The proposed project will have no impact on historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

No Action Alternative: There will be no impact to historical or archaeological sites under this alternative.

11. AESTHETICS: Is the project on a prominent topographic feature? Will it be visible from populated or scenic areas? Will there be excessive noise or light?

The proposed line is directly adjacent to a county road for a stretch, and near a Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) public fishing access site. The project will be readily visible to the public during installation. Following a short period of regrowth after installation, there will be little to no visible evidence of the line.

Action Alternative: Where the line is buried underground, it will not alter the aesthetics at all after installation activities have ceased. At the river crossing, the suspended line and the upright posts to suspend it on either side of the river will be visible to the public that may be recreating on the river or at the fishing access site. There are already multiple lines crossing the river in this general area.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to aesthetics associated with the School Trust land.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY: Will the project use resources that are limited in the area? Are there other activities nearby that will affect the project?

Environmental resources in the area are not specifically limited and are not affected by the proposed project. No nearby activities will affect the project.

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	<p>Action Alternative: The proposed project will place no additional demands on any environmental resources in the area.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no demands placed on environmental resources of land, water, air or energy.</p>
13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA: Are there other studies, plans or projects on this tract?	<p>There are currently no other studies, plans or projects on these tracts.</p> <p>Action Alternative: This project will not impact any other plans or studies that Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation has on the School Trust land.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to the plans or studies that Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation has on the School Trust land.</p>

III. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION	
RESOURCE	POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES
14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY: Will this project add to health and safety risks in the area?	<p>The operation and movement of heavy equipment and vehicles has inherent risks that are not impacted by access across the School Trust land.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The installation of the line will not add to safety risks in the area.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to human health or safety.</p>
15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION: Will the project add to or alter these activities?	<p>The area of impact is managed for seasonal livestock grazing.</p> <p>Action Alternative: Any short-term</p>

	<p>disturbance to vegetation would be too small to have a measurable economic impact on the agricultural activities on this tract.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to agricultural activities on the School Trust land.</p>
16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT: Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number.	<p>Action Alternative: The project will not create nor impact any jobs in the area.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to quantity and distribution of employment under this alternative.</p>
17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES: Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue?	<p>Action Alternative: The project will have no impacts on the local and state tax base and tax revenues.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to the local and state tax base under this alternative.</p>
18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES: Will substantial traffic be added to existing roads? Will other services (fire protection, police, schools, etc) be needed?	<p>Action Alternative: The project will increase vehicle traffic in the area during installation. There would be no additional demand for governmental services.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no additional demand for government services.</p>
19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS: Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?	<p>There are no special management plans in effect on the School Trust lands. They are managed for typical agricultural activities.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The project has cleared State (DNRC) management plans.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to locally adopted environmental plans and goals.</p>
20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS	<p>On the McCone county side of the river, this tract is directly adjacent</p>

<p>ACTIVITIES: Are wilderness or recreational areas nearby or accessed through this tract? Is there recreational potential within the tract?</p>	<p>to, and accessible, from a county road. On the Valley county side, the line runs adjacent to a county road and FWP fishing access site that is used frequently by recreationists to access the river.</p> <p>Action Alternative: No changes to public land access or recreational potential will occur.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to the recreational values associated with the School Trust land under this alternative.</p>
<p>21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING: Will the project add to the population and require additional housing?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The project will not impact the density and distribution of population and housing.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to the density and distribution of population and housing.</p>
<p>22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES: Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The project will enhance telecommunications capabilities for residents in the surrounding area.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to the social structures under this alternative.</p>
<p>23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY: Will the action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The project will not impact the cultural uniqueness and diversity of this rural area.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to the cultural uniqueness and diversity under this alternative.</p>
<p>24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:</p>	<p>This project is intended to provide greater telecommunication capabilities in the surrounding area/communities. This is a rural area with limited capabilities currently.</p> <p>Action Alternative: Allowing installation of the line across School</p>

	<p>Trust lands would have relatively little economic impact to the School Trust but would provide surrounding communities with increased telecommunications capabilities.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to the social and economic circumstances under this alternative.</p>
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EA Checklist Prepared By: s/Jack Medlicott\s Date: 6/27/19
Jack Medlicott, Land Use Specialist

IV. FINDING	
25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:	Action Alternative
26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:	No significant impacts expected.
27. Need for Further Environmental Analysis: <input type="checkbox"/> EIS <input type="checkbox"/> More Detailed EA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No Further Analysis	

EA Checklist Approved By: Matthew Poole Glasgow Unit Manager
Name Title

s/Matthew Poole\s Date: July 1, 2019
Signature